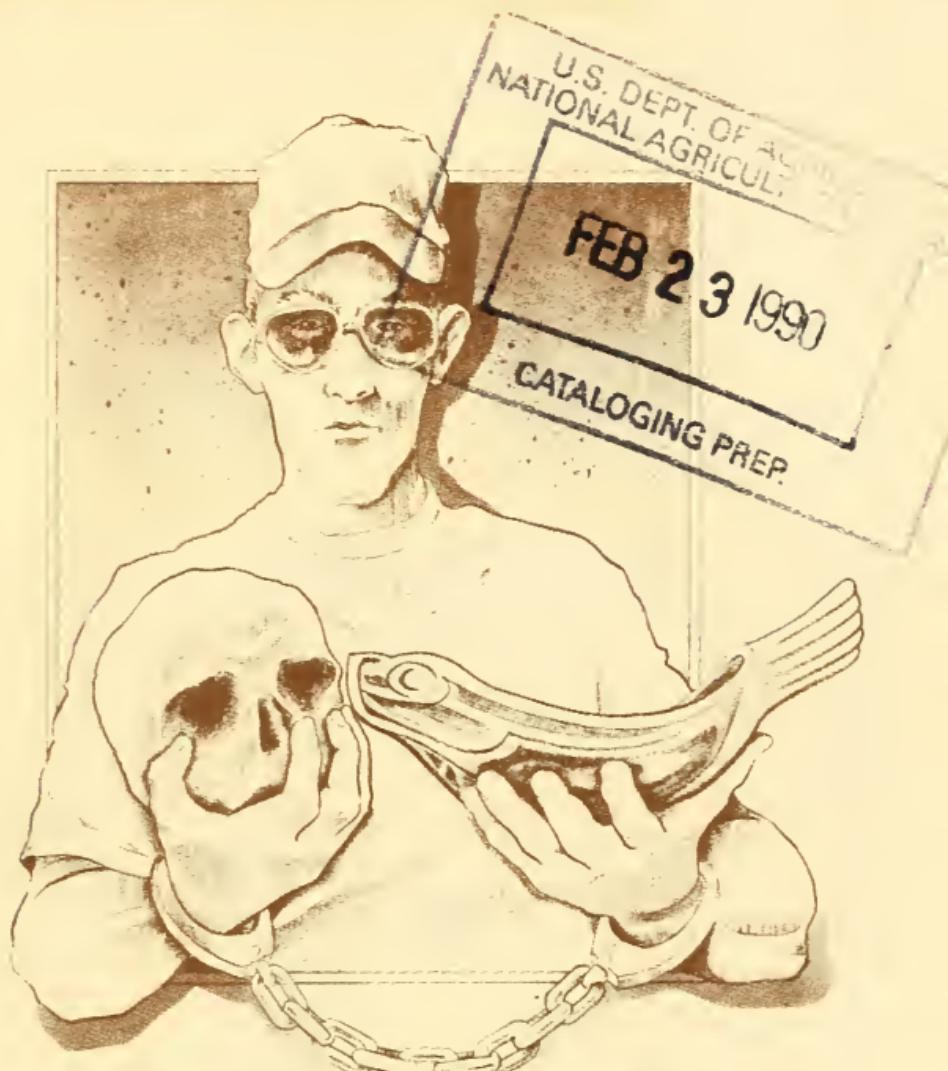


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Thieves of Time



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He's Stealing From You.

24 OCT 1989



USDA Forest Service
Pacific Northwest Region



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"Now I've earned my \$1,000." were the words of this **Thief of Time** as an undercover law enforcement agent snapped his picture. The thief was later arrested and successfully prosecuted for illegally excavating this burial in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

What's the Problem?

This scenario is a real one, and common throughout the American West today. Federal land managers working for the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other agencies are responsible for managing cultural resources scattered over millions of acres of public lands. Often there is insufficient time and staffing to do a complete job of protecting these rare and fragile artifacts, so the resource is disappearing at an alarming rate. The situation is critical because scientific, educational, and American Indian religious values are lost forever when an archaeological site is damaged or destroyed.

Theft of artifacts from public lands has long been illegal. The Antiquities Act of 1906 was the first attempt to protect them, and in 1979, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) was passed by Congress to update and strengthen the original antiquities law. When combined with other state and federal historic preservation legislation, these laws provide a strong mandate from the American people to protect and preserve our Nation's cultural heritage.

Despite the clear intent of these laws, artifact collecting has become a major problem in the West. Every year artifact collectors loot hundreds of prehistoric campsites, illegally dig up caves, and deface prehistoric rock paintings and carvings. We know that artifacts collected from sites in Oregon have been sold to collectors throughout the United States and as far away as Europe and the Orient.

Collectors or Thieves?

There are many misconceptions about artifact collecting and the people who do it. Some people defend artifact collecting and digging as a hobby that doesn't really damage anything, but the facts show that this isn't true. Law enforcement investigations document large scale theft of the public's heritage, often as a commercial business by people involved in other illegal activities such as drugs and firewood theft. These artifact hunters are neither cultural preservationists nor "amateur archaeologists." They keep the artifacts they find for their private collections and don't report their finds to federal land managers.

Archaeological sites are damaged whenever arrowheads and other artifacts are disturbed. They should be left alone and reported to the appropriate agency so that archaeologists can study them and gather information to be used in museum exhibits, interpretive displays, and books on archaeology and early American Indian cultures. These displays and books provide all citizens with an understanding of prehistory and inspire true "amateur archaeologists" to pursue their hobby by working on "digs" or archaeological surveys sponsored by educational institutions or government agencies.



Interpretation is used to deter vandalism as well as to encourage interest in archaeology.



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Unfortunately, the activities of artifact thieves are not curbed through education. Their primary interest is in having the artifacts or selling them, rather than understanding the prehistoric story and preserving it for future generations. Thus, their artifact collecting activities represent a serious theft of the public's heritage, and the cumulative damage produced from years of such activity has reached critical dimensions. It must be stopped, so ARPA and federal law enforcement activities are directed toward these **Thieves of Time**.

What You Can Do

The situation is not hopeless. The Forest Service and other federal agencies have instituted comprehensive site protection programs involving site patrolling, monitoring, information gathering, and undercover operations. But the greatest protection for these valuable resources is increased public awareness and your personal involvement.

To protect your cultural heritage you can:

- Report archaeological and historical sites you discover while in the woods
- Be aware of suspicious activity near known sites
- Report artifact digging and vandalism of rock paintings and other sites

Together we can stop the **Thieves of Time**.



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For Further Information

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